THEMATIC REVIEW
OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION AND CARE
POLICY

Background report
Flanders (Belgium)

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Preface

THEMATIC REVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICY

Preface
Introduction

This report covers the area of Early Childhood Education in the Flemish Community, which represents more than 6 million people on a total of 10 million for Belgium as a whole.

We focus on previsions for children between 0 and 6 years of age, taking entrance in (formal) primary education as the point of transition to another area. As a general orientation we can mention that a clear distinction can be made between the domain of care (for children below 3) and the domain of education (in fact pre-school) where most children enrol when they are 2.5 or 3.

The structure given by the comprehensive but well-balanced questionnaire of the OESO-secretariat, was respected as much as possible. As a consequence, the same themes are addressed several sections, each time however looking at them from another angle.

This work, covering so many area’s couldn’t be done without the help of many. We wish to acknowledge the persons interviewed in the stage of data collection and the members of the steering group for their most valuable feedback.

Last, but not least, we want to express our appreciation to Wilfried Boomgaert from the Department of Education, for the supportive and efficient way he co-ordinated this stage of the OESO-project.

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is influenced by three factors: births, deaths and migration. The number of births increased slightly in 1997, the number of deaths on the contrary, decreased. The natural growth is bigger than the migration balance in contrast with previous years.

**FAMILY**

Marriage is less popular than ever. For the first time in years the number of marriages is lower than 30.000. The rate of divorces amounts almost to 14.000. On January first 1998, there were 2.353.864 private households in Flanders. Almost six out of ten households consist of maximum two persons.

**EMPLOYMENT**

Between 1995 and 1997 the degree of unemployment decreased for men as well as for women. Only 5,3% of the professional active population has no employment. Youth unemployment is above the average unemployment degree. Tab. 1 shows a comparison in the degree of unemployment between Flanders and Belgium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Flanders</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
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<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 1: Degree of unemployment by sex and age in % (1997).
Source: NIS, SEB, Eurostat
POVERTY
Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) developed a poverty indicator that takes six components into account. If a family scores badly on three components, it is defined as poor. In 1997 2,603 children in Flanders were born in a poor family. That means 4% of all births and an increase in comparison with 1996. According to Cantillon (1998) less than 7% of the children live in deprived conditions.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ECEC
The educational responsibilities are vested in the hands of the communities. Each Community has its own education system. Within the Ministry of the Flemish Community, the Education Department is responsible for nearly all aspects of the education policy. The Flemish Minister of Education heads the department. The federal authorities are only responsible for the pensions of staff members of educational institutions, for laying down compulsory school attendance and for determining the minimum requirements to obtain a diploma.

Responsibilities concerning care belong to Kind en Gezin, an organisation under the supervision the Flemish Ministry of Welfare. Kind en Gezin operates on two levels. At the central organisational level policy is prepared, executed and co-ordinated. The provincial level is in charge of the operational tasks.

The Minister of Education and the Minister of Welfare are primarily involved in the field of ECEC. Other ministers hold responsibilities concerning education and care but their involvement is relatively small. The Flemish Ministry of Labour, for instance, is involved through the VDAB (i.e. Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency). This service contributes to the in-service training of people wanting to work in the out-of-school care and the Flemish Minister for youth is responsible for most initiatives in youth work, an issue that is not being discussed in this report.

Historical roots of care and education
Flanders has a long tradition in ECEC provision. The roots of education and care can be found in the beginning of the 19th century when the industrial development was at full force. Because women and older children were part of the workforce, organised care and education for young children was necessary.

CARE
The first registered “kinderbewaarplaats” dates from 1845. The main aim in these institutions, developed in a sphere of charity, was the ‘keeping’ of children of working people. The ideal remained motherly care at home. In 1919 the “Natioanaal Werk voor Kinderwelzijn” [National Work for the Well-being of the Child] was established as a co-ordinating service of the government to control that child care was being provided for the most needy under the workforce.

On the other hand, policy engagement in care for children from 0 to 3 has only become more important in the last decades. Before the fifties, the main efforts were directed towards the physical well-being of children. Recently more attention in this area is directed towards a pedagogical approach and professional development of staff (Janssen-Vos & Laevers, 1996; Oberhuemer & Ulich, 1997).

EDUCATION
The first school for infants dates from 1828. The influence of Fröbel was apparent from the middle of the 19th century. The first Fröbel kindergarten was established in 1857. A year later, training for “kleuterleidsters” was set up. In 1880 the first ministerial directives were issued to regulate the operation of “kleuterscholen” and the first model curriculum in 1890 drew its inspiration largely from the work of Fröbel. From 1880 on institutes for the education of children between 3-6 years of age developed as part of the school system. Encouraged by the official policy, “kleuteronderwijs” was shaped early and extended quickly. Two factors facilitated this: (1) the high population density made that in almost every village there were enough children to start a “kleuterschool” and (2) religious orders were very keen to expand education for young children and to start early with moral and religious education.
At the end of the 19th century consensus was established about the need for pre-school education as a transition between home and primary school, with the indication that a “kleuterschool” mustn’t be a real school. As a consequence the training of “kleuterleidsters” stayed separated and was installed at the end of the 19th century. In 1927 more official guidelines for the training of “kleuterleidsters” were issued and the training was brought to three years. In 1951 the ‘Werkplan voor opvoedende activiteiten’ [Work Plan for Educational activities] was issued in which the influence of Montessori and Decroly – a Belgian pedagogue - becomes apparent as a general framework for the regulation of the curriculum. A review of this plan appeared in 1977, while a new version will be issued very soon. The engagement of the policy for the education of children from 3 to 6 years old has been substantial since the beginning. (Janssen-Vos & Laevers, 1996; Oberhuemer & Ulich, 1997).

Common understandings

The early childhood period is seen as an important era in the development of a person. The attention given by policy and press to the ‘Universal Declaration of the Rights of Children’, has increased the importance attached to the well-being of children and their position in society. Parents are seen as the first responsible for the upbringing of their children. At the same time, the state is expected to contribute to the well-being of children by providing or financing ECEC and the guarding of quality (CBGS, 1996). Pre-school education is an acquired right of young children and many efforts are being made to protect the individual character of this provision in which playful learning is stressed (interviews; CBGS, 1996).

While there was still a debate in the eighties on the possible negative effects of early separation of children of their home, care is now seen by a majority as an acceptable substitution for the care at home. A decade ago, the view on women was ambiguous. Often the exercise of a profession by a women was only honourable on condition that she took care of her children first (VBJK, 1996). Recently, more attention is being given to the role of the father in the upbringing of children. In the media articles about men choosing to stay at home and to take care of children illustrate this trend. At the same time, more and more women choose to work part-time.

Main political, economic, social and demographic changes

ECEC policy has been influenced by the following developments:

- An increase of the number of women/mothers working, especially in the category of women between 25-49 years of age. In this age group the activity degree was 64% in 1990. In the group of women younger than 35 the activity degree mounts up to 75 to 80%.
- A decrease of the fertility figure because women wait longer to get children and a decrease in the number of births.
- More attention, also by policy, for migrants and a multicultural society.
- An increase of families where both parents work, because of the increase of the activity degree of mothers. 60% of the children under 12 has a mother in salaried employment. 90% has a father in salaried employment. Families get smaller. The average size of a household was 2.64 persons in 1991. This makes care more affordable for families.
- A growing awareness of the government and the population of the problem of poverty. Belgium, and especially Flanders in comparison to the international scene, is doing well in this area: less than 7% children (in 1998) living in deprived conditions (Cantillon, 1999).
- Regulations concerning part-time work have become more pliable. One third of Flemish children has a mother who works part-time (Maes & Van Meensel, 1994; K&G, 1998a).

CARE

Because of these changes attention is being paid (1) to the combination of work and family, (2) to the extension of provision to meet the growing demand, (3) to install quality provision for children outside the school hours, (4) to the development of care for children of deprived families and (5) to the support and training of immigrant women in care and the
development of a multicultural approach in “kinderdagverblijven”.

EDUCATION
In education the same topics arise: a concern to support children from deprived homes and from immigrant origin, multicultural education, initiatives to stop the drop out to special education and special attention for the emotional development of children.

National/regional child or family policy

In 1984, “Kind & Gezin” was established by Decree (29/5/1984) as the Flemish continuation for the former, Belgian “NWK”. The task of “Kind & Gezin” is to look after the life chances, the well-being and the health of the child and to support the parents with regard to the care for the child. In this the main target group are children under 3. This task is translated in three main assignments, namely “Preventieve zorg” [preventive care] before, during and after the birth of a child; the recognition, subsidising and supervising of the different forms of “Kinderopvang” [care]; and the “Specifieke zorg” [particular care] for children who live in situations which cannot be considered as regular (particular care and crisis care; child abuse and adoption).

“Kind & Gezin” is a Flemish public service, responsible for the execution of the policy regarding children. “Kind & Gezin” can execute the governmental policy independently (with an own juridical statute), although it operates under the supervision of the department of social welfare, public health and culture (c.q. the minister of social welfare, health and equal opportunities). It has closed a management agreement with the Flemish Government, which consists of engagements for the services delivered by “Kind & Gezin” and the budget received for it from the government. (Janssen-Vos & Laevers, 1996; Welzijnsszakboekje, 1998).

While the provision of care is well co-ordinated, other initiatives to support children and families are fragmented between socio-political organisations on the one hand and different public services (“Kind & Gezin”, Department of Education, Department of Welfare, Public Health and Culture and the Ministry of Labour and Employment) on the other. Only recently, the different departments make an effort to inform one another in order to co-ordinate their policy.

Current objectives and purposes

CARE
Care is more than looking after the children. Taking into account recent social tendencies (searching an equilibrium between individual development of well-being and the demands of the economic reality), “Kind & Gezin” puts two pillars at the centre: the interest of the child and the support of the family.

In order to fulfil the emancipatory function of care for all children and all families who wish to make use of it, “Kind & Gezin” aims to make regular care accessible for all children irrespective of their family situation, their socio-economic living conditions, their ethnic background and their individual problems. (Kind & Gezin, 1996)

EDUCATION
In pre-school education the fundamental educational objectives are:
• Basisvorming [basic education] as a cohesive entity;
• in function of the total personality development of the children;
• with an optimal support of all children involved [“zorgbreedte”]

These objectives form the core. They are elaborated in the “ontwikkelingsdoelen” [developmental objectives] (see section II. A.), minimum goals a “kleuterschool” [pre-primary institution] has to strive for (Departement Onderwijs, 1995; 1996b).
Target groups and age spans

ECEC is divided in two areas: Care for children from 0-3 and pre-school education for children from 2.5-6. Since 1997 the new area of “buitenschoolse opvang” – a provision for children from 2.5-12 outside the school hours - is under the authority of “Kind & Gezin” as well.

■ CARE
Care is primarily meant for children and their working parents'. Special attention is given to children of parents with a low income and children of single-parent families. Care is organised for children from 0-12, children from 0-3 form the main target group (Welzijnszakboekje, 1998), for the older children care deals with catering for children outside school times.

■ EDUCATION
Pre-primary education is open for all children. Education is a right for all. Compulsory school age begins at 6 and ends at 18 years of age. On the first of September of the year they will be 6, children enter primary school. So ECEC is meant for children from birth to compulsory school age, with the exception of “buitenschoolse opvang” (this is a provision for children from 2.5-12, cfr. supra). As a result of an agreement between political parties, it is the intention of the government to raise this age from 2 1/2 to 3. Because of the vehement debate that followed this announcement, the decision has been postponed to explore first the consequences of this measure.

Forms of ECEC

■ CARE
In care there are three categories of facilities:

1. Recognised and subsidised by “Kind & Gezin” (they have fulfilled the conditions for recognition and are therefore subsidised): “kinderdagverblijven” [Child care centres] and “DOG’s” [recognised centres organising home based care]
2. Reported and under supervision, but not recognised and not subsidised (because of the certificate of supervision the parents are entitled to a tax deduction for the Care for their children under 3)
3. Only reported (the policy has introduced this obligation to keep track of the evolution in the area).

Categories 2 and 3 organising care, are private. They comprise “Particuliere opvanginstellingen” ("POIs") [private care centres] and “Particuliere opvanggezinnen” ("POGs") [private home based care].

“Buitenschoolse opvang” can also be provided by the centre-based and home-based arrangements and by schools. “IBO’s” [Initiatives for care of children outside the school hours] are recognised by “Kind & Gezin”.

■ EDUCATION
Within the educational system and as part of the elementary school, pre-school is open for children from 2 1/2 to 3 years of age.
Responsibilities for ECEC

As mentioned before there is a clear division between the organisation of care and education in Flanders. The division runs along conceptual, political and administrative lines and has a long tradition. Official responsibilities are at the level of the Flemish Community since the federalisation.

- **CARE**
  - Care is the responsibility of “Kind & Gezin” which falls under the supervision of the minister of Welfare, Health and Equal Opportunities of the Flemish Community. “Kind & Gezin” operates on two levels. At the central organisational level policy is prepared, executed and co-ordinated. The provincial level is in charge of the operational tasks, e.g. decentralised responsibilities regarding the staff, support of the concrete activities in the field. (Kind & Gezin, 1997d)

- **EDUCATION**
  - Education is the authority of the Ministry of the Flemish Community. Three matters however are still at the federal (Belgian) level: (1) the determination of the beginning and ending of compulsory education, (2) the minimal conditions for the issuing of the diplomas and (3) the rules for the retirement of the teaching staff.

  There’s an increasing trend towards giving more autonomy to the “inrichtende machten” [school boards] and the schools. The “inrichtende macht” is responsible for the establishment of the school, the development of the educational project, choice of teaching materials, determination of the timetable, drafting of school regulations, the internal organisational structure of the school and the management of financial means. In practice the “directeur” takes on many of these tasks (Janssen-Vos & Laevers, 1996). Almost all schools are united in one of the four “koepekels” or umbrella organisations (cfr. Other actors).

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CARE</th>
<th>Level of coverage by age</th>
<th>Hours/length of operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre-based “kinderdagverblijven”</td>
<td>0-3 years</td>
<td>10-12 hours a day whole year open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-based “Diensten voor opvanggezinnen”</td>
<td>0-3 years (14%)</td>
<td>10-12 hours a day whole year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Initiatieven voor buitenschoolse opvang”</td>
<td>2.5-12 years</td>
<td>Before and after school, Wednesday afternoons, holidays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION</th>
<th>Level of coverage by age</th>
<th>Hours/length of operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream and Special education (“Buitengewoon onderwijs”)</td>
<td>2.5-6 years</td>
<td>Monday to Friday from 8.30 to 12.00 from 13.30 to 15.30 (not on Wednesday afternoon) From 1/9 until 31/8 Average of 182 schooldays a year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* percentage of children of this age group visiting this type of facility

Tab. 2: Overview of ECEC facilities, the level of coverage of the facilities and their hours of operation.
Other official bodies

**CARE**
Within the Administration body ‘Family and Social Welfare’ of the Department of Welfare, Public Health and Culture, the Centre for Population and Family Study (CBGS) operates. The centre has the task to fulfil scientific research relevant to policy in the field of population and family. (CBGS, 1996) The CBGS is also in charge of the scientific support of the “Gezins- en Welzijnsraad” (family and welfare board), an official advisory body of the Flemish government.

**EDUCATION**

In education the ‘Vlaamse Onderwijsraad’ (VlOR) [the Flemish Education Council] was established by decree of 31/7/1990. The “VlOR” has a general competence for study, concerted action, and consultation, on its own initiative or at the request of the Minister of Education, with regard to all educational matters for which the Flemish Community is responsible. More in particular, the Minister of Education has to seek, prior to the discussion in the Flemish Parliament, the professional advice of the “VlOR” on all preliminary draft decrees on educational matters (with the exception of the Education Budget) and on policy reports and papers addressed to the Flemish Parliament. The General Council of the “VlOR” is composed of representatives of the organising bodies of education, staff, parents, socio-economic organisations, educational experts from the universities and the educational administration. The General Council is authorised to advise in matters concerning the global educational policy. For subjects regarding the educational levels, there are specific councils and departments (Eurybase; Janssen-Vos & Laevers, 1996).

The “Inspectie Basisonderwijs” [inspectorate for elementary education] audits schools. Its assignment is described under section III.

The “Dienst voor Onderwijsontwikkeling” (DVO) [Department of Educational Development (DED)] is a unit within the Department of Education, created bij Decree of 17/7/1999. The DED is responsible for the development of “ontwikkelingsdoelen” [the official minimal developmental objectives for the preschool area], “eindtermen” [the final objectives for the primary level] and “basiscOMPETENTIES” [basic competencies for teacher education]. Other tasks are: the development of instruments to audit schools, development of the educational structure (on macro-level) and support and advice to the administration and government concerning educational issues.” (Text of the Government of Flanders. Act on Inspection and Guidance Services. April 13, 1999).

Co-ordination of policy between the several educational bodies is very strong while the collaboration between the different ministerial departments (i.e. the department responsible for care and the one responsible for education) is rather poor.

Other actors

**CARE**
Important actors in the field of care are “VCOK” and “VBJK”. The Flemish Committee for the Raising of the Young Child (“VCOK”) is a training centre which offers courses for every one involved in the care of children between 0-12. Annually “VCOK” organises more than 1.200 hours of courses. Closely related to “VCOK” is “VBJK”, Resource and Training Centre for Childcare (financed by “Kind & Gezin). “VBJK” develops materials (books, video productions, ...) concerning different aspects of care, edits a periodical for all care staff members (Kido), gives advice on care policy and provides in-service training on request.

**EDUCATION**

A particular characteristic for Flanders is the compartmentalisation or polarisation of the educational field. The organisation of education is divided among three “onderwijsnetten”: 1. “(Officieel) Gemeenschapsonderwijs” [Official Community education], covering 13 % of the pupils. 2. “Officieel Gesubsidieerd Onderwijs” : “Gemeentelijk en Provinciaal Onderwijs” [Official subsidised education: network of municipal and provincial schools], covering 18 % of the pupils. 3. “Vrij Gesubsidieerd Onderwijs” [Private subsidised education] of which most schools are Catholic – covering 68 % of the pupils.

The institutions of the different “onderwijsnetten” are united in umbrella organisations, which represent the
schools towards the general policy. Within these organisations, “Pedagogische Begeleidingsdiensten” [pedagogical support services] and “Navormingscentra” [in-service training centres] operate to improve educational quality.

Other agents in the field are the teacher training institutions and the university departments of education. Associated to these departments are two centres of support. Linked to the University of Gent, is the ‘Steunpunt ICO’ (orientated to ‘intercultural education’). The ‘Steunpunt NT2’ is attached to the Leuven University and focuses on second language learning for immigrant children.

Another influential actor is the Research Centre for Early Childhood and Primary Education at the Leuven University which is involved in several research and in-service training projects and is linked to the foundation that supports the innovation project “ErvaringsGericht Onderwijs” [Experiential Education].
2. POLICY CONCERNS

2.1 QUALITY

Conceptualisation of quality

- CARE
While the care sector has a strong medical tradition, the last decade the accent is shifting to the pedagogical quality. At the moment, new criteria for quality are being developed. They will be implemented as soon as possible as a result of the implementation of the ‘Quality decree’ (1/1/1997).

The main aim of this decree is to oblige all recognised welfare facilities to work on “kwaliteit van zorg” (quality of care) and “kwaliteitszorg” (quality care). “Quality of care” deals with the way service is supplied. Service has to be focused on the user, be efficient, effective, continuous and social. “Quality care” regards the management mechanisms which are used to reach a stable and sufficient quality of care. By means of these mechanisms, the facilities have to prove that they are shaping the desired quality level structurally and systematically and that its realisation is not coincidental. The care sector has to fill in these terms ‘quality of care’ and ‘quality care’ and has to translate the decree in a new legislation specific to care.

The new legislation has to be completed by the end of 1999 and not later than 1/1/2003 the minimal quality requirements and the quality care will become the recognition standard.

- EDUCATION
The notion of quality is very much attached to the ideal of an educational system that helps all children to develop their potential in a harmonious way. This means: with a lot of attention to the non-academic aspects such as the emotional and social development. Since 1994 a particular concern is evident to improve quality by innovations that help schools to cater in a more comprehensive way for the specific developmental needs of children who (risk to) drop out.

The instrument developed for the inspectorate expresses a lot of this philosophy (see further). It also integrates recent insights concerning the structural and cultural dimensions of the school organisations, which is seen as a crucial condition for the quality of learning. In recent years the department of education has taken steps to concretise the notion of ‘Quality of education’ by formulating “ontwikkelingsdoelen” [developmental objectives]. The “ontwikkelingsdoelen” were formulated by the “DVO” with cooperation of persons out of the educational field, teachers, heads of schools and external experts, and approved by the Flemish Parliament, upon the recommendation of the “VLOR”. They were discussed in a broad social forum.

Box 1. “Ontwikkelingsdoelen” for pre-school education

‘Ontwikkelingsdoelen’ are minimum objectives regarding the knowledge, insights, skills, and attitudes, which are considered desirable and attainable for the majority of pupils in pre-school. "Ontwikkelingsdoelen" have to be striven for, not reached. Since 1 September 1999, all schools have to provide their pupils activities related to the "ontwikkelingsdoelen". Primary education has to look at the "ontwikkelingsdoelen" as points of reference for the beginning of its education, rather than as realised objectives.

Box 1. “Ontwikkelingsdoelen” for pre-school education

It is expected that schools can take the responsibility for the implementation of these objectives and of their educational quality (Departement Onderwijs, 1996b). The freedom of schools to shape their own educational project is felt as a fundamental right.
Objectives and assessment

CARE

“Kind & Gezin” looks at the pedagogical quality reached and the preconditions to achieve this. Therefore rating scales have been developed and still are being developed: the ‘Rating scale for the pedagogical environment in “kinderdagverblijven”’ [day care centres] and the ‘Quality instrument for “POI’s”’ [private care centres].

The rating scales focus on the pedagogic interaction (flexibility, individualisation, stimulation, structuring, stimulating the child’s independence, giving the child freedom of movement and safety) and on the pedagogic framework conditions (childminding skills, cooperation with the parents, teamwork, meetings, staff training and pedagogic observation) (Kind & Gezin, 1994; 1997b).

Box 2. Policy approaches towards quality improvement in care

Other policy approaches towards quality improvement are:

- The possibility to employ a part-time psychologist or pedagogue in the staffing of “kinderdagverblijven” (since 1983); the recruitment standard however, is high (one part-time per 46 child places) so that in practice there aren’t many psychologists or pedagogues employed in the sector.
- The supply of training support of the staff.
- Information & prevention campaigns for the private facilities (“POIs” and “POGs”) regarding items that have been found not to meet quality requirements, ...

(VBIK, 1996; 1998; Welzijnszakboekje, 1998)

There’s no extensive research yet on the impact of these policy approaches. The first judgement of a number of facilities with the rating scales shows generally a substantial pedagogic quality (not one group scores under the minimum concerning the observed quality).

EDUCATION

Since 1991, quality is assessed during a “schooldoorlichting” (cfr. p. 17), where before individual teachers or subjects were inspected. Depending on the number of pupils the inspection team consists of two to six members, who visit the school for one whole week. They look at the general functioning of the school, taking into account the minimum curricula (see below) and the execution of the regulations. The compliance with the legal prescriptions is verified. These prescriptions concern infrastructure, hygiene, working with an approved curriculum.

Inspection begins with the collection of contextual (financial, demographic, structural and material, juridical, administrative and teaching data) and input data (data about children, teachers, the “directeur”) to map the individual identity of the school. Then, the team of inspectors examine the current school situation using interviews, observations, and analysis of documents.

The “schooldoorlichting” is guided by an instrument developed by the “DVO” and the inspectorate. This instrument has as frame of analysis the CIPO-model: Context-Input-Process-Output. (Departement Onderwijs, 1996b; 1998a)

Attention is given to several dimensions of educational practice, such as the efficient use of time, vertical and horizontal coherence in the content, adapted physical environment, clarity in expectations and feedback, alertness with regard to children with emotional and learning difficulties... A central concern is the emotional well-being and involvement of children, in the perspective of which inspectors observe the opportunity for children to be active, to make choices and take initiative, to be challenged by contents that meet their interests, to develop a personal taste and opinion. At the same time characteristics of the school as an organisation are explored, such as the quality of the leadership, communication and collegiality, professional development and a collective sense of efficacy.

After the visit the inspection team writes a synthesis report with a summary, a critical evaluation and a number of conclusions. The report is intended for policy and the “inrichtende macht” of the school. Furthermore it is sent to the “directeur”, who has to discuss it with the staff.
Other policy approaches towards quality improvement are:

- The establishment of the 'Pedagogische Begeleidingsdiensten', attached to the school networks: they contribute to the educational quality and provide external support for the schools, for the purpose of realising the pedagogical projects specific to an organising body.

- The stimulation of in-service training. This area has been reorganised since 1996. An important part of the budget is set free to allocate means directly to schools, who are free to buy the training they need. It is expected that this form of decentralisation stimulates schools to take responsibility and that it will have a positive impact on the quality of training on offer.

- The extra subsidies for the "Onderwijsvoorrangsbepaling" and for "Zorgverbreding" which represent a huge investment. (cfr infra: Innovative strategies; Issues of diversity and multicultural education)

- The introduction of self-evaluation of the schools as part of the new inspection system and the new schemes for external support. It is the ultimate aim of the "schooldoorlichting" that after the audit schools consult about how to develop into autonomous, self-conscious and qualitative schools via a systematic self-evaluation.

- The possibility to employ a psychologist or pedagogue/remedial teacher in schools for "Buitengewoon onderwijs", since 1/9/1997. But as the total allocated teacher hours was not adapted, many schools don’t have the available hours to take in this expertise.

The impact of several of these measures is being researched in several projects.

2.2 ACCESS

■ CARE

In the care area access is not a statutory entitlement. Care is primarily meant for children of working parents. Special attention is going to children of parents with a low income and children of single-parent families. In order to reach the target group - mainly: the children from 0 to 3 -, the principle of ‘multi-stage access’ is used. The parental contribution depends also on their income and is determined on a sliding scale\(^1\). For deprived families and migrants other extra efforts are made to lower the threshold to care facilities. For instance there is the intention to stimulate initiatives in a number of districts of large cities which fill in care in a broader concept of support with regard to the families and the social integration at district level.

■ EDUCATION

Access to pre-school is a statutory entitlement for all children from 2.5 to 6 years of age. For children younger than three, enrolment in a school is only possible on five moments over a school year. When a child has special educational needs, it has the right to “Buitengewoon onderwijs”. Enrolment in a school for “Buitengewoon onderwijs” however, requires a report that specifies the type of education that corresponds to the disability and needs of the child. A multidisciplinary examination (medical, social, psychological and educational) is conducted by the “Psycho-Medisch Sociaal centrum”\(^1\) in order to come to the right option for that child. However because of the constitutional liberty of education parents can’t be obliged to send their child to “Buitengewoon onderwijs”.

Extent of choice for parents and influence by policy

■ CARE

In this area there are not many possibilities for choice. There is the choice between care in a centre-based environment or care in a home-based environment. There’s the choice between subsidised or private facilities. For most parents the choice is determined in the first place by the distance between care and home (Maes & Van Meensel, 1994).
For low-income families, efforts are made to make care more accessible, but in these families the choice to stay home to take care of their own children often prevails. But also low-income families where the parents rest on the labour market, don’t make use of subsidised care because the extra costs still demand a too great financial effort. Therefore the most of them opt to leave their children with family or friends.

As a consequence of the deeply rooted principle that parents are responsible for the upbringing of their children, “Kind & Gezin” acts neutrally and will not favour one model or (type of) setting. Tax deduction for care (see section III.E.) in facilities under supervision and in the subsidised facilities will still leave a lot of options open, as far as these settings still represent a wide variety of practices.

**EDUCATION**

Access to pre-school education is free in the financed and subsidised schools. No registration fee has to be paid and the materials necessary for education are provided. Schools however, can ask parents for money for extra activities and expenses can tighten their school choice (HIVA, 1989). Because schools belonging to the sector of Community schools offer cheap meals at noon, low-income parents tend to choose for them.

In education, free choice of parents is encouraged, it is determined in the Constitution. Parents have the right to choose freely between official and private education. To make this choice possible Community schools have to be accessible within a certain distance of any parent wanting that type of ‘neutral’ education.

### Supply of and demand for different forms of ECEC

**CARE**

54,4% of all children between 3 months and 3 years of age were regularly (this means at least once a week) entrusted to family, to a home- or centre-based arrangement. 3,4% occasionally use child-minding facilities and 42,2% of children in this age group are never going to these facilities. (Kind en Gezin, 1997)

Care for children between 1 and 3 months happens exceptional. When looking at the proportion of children in Care in relation to the total population of children under three, 266 places per 1000 children under 3 are available in the subsidised facilities and the facilities under supervision. The table shows how they are spread over the forms of care (Source: Kind & Gezin, 1998a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of care facilities in 1997</th>
<th>Number of places in care in 1997</th>
<th>Number of enrolled* children in 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kinderdagverblijven</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO G’s</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>12.945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognised and subsidised by “Kind &amp; Gezin”</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>26.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>517</td>
<td>39.517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P O I’s</strong></td>
<td>572</td>
<td>8.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P OG’s</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>7.643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under supervision of “Kind &amp; Gezin”</td>
<td>2343</td>
<td>15.941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** “IBO ‘s” recognised by “Kind &amp; Gezin”**</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>119.874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*each child attending at least one day is considered to be enrolled

**Tab. 3:** Number of care facilities, number of places in care and number of enrolled in 1997

**POLICY CONCERNS**
In 1997 39,517 places were available in the subsidised facilities. The capacity of the facilities under supervision of “Kind & Gezin” comes to about 16,000 places.

Care is to a great extent provided by grandparents and other family members. Grandparents provide 38% of the Care, other family members 2.3%. 37.5% of the children in Care make use of subsidised Care facilities: 21.9% are cared for in an “opvanggezin” linked to a “DOG” and 15.3% make use of a “kinderdagverblijf”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of child minding</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third parties outside family, at home</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third parties outside family, outside the home</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-minding family affiliated to a service (subsidised by Child and Family)</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day nursery (subsidised by Child and Family)</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private child-minding family registered with or supervised by Child and Family</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private child-minding centre registered with or supervised by Child and Family</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-care and family support centre</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school care</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 4: Children aged between 3 months and 3 years: use of child-minding (Region of Flanders). Source: Child and Family – Survey on the use of child-minding facilities for children aged under 3 [1997]

In the area the “buitenschoolse opvang” almost 50% of children visiting pre-school and 29% of children attending primary school are taken care of by others than their parents during the week. Grandparents are the most important caretakers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of child minding</th>
<th>Children attending nursery school</th>
<th>Children attending primary school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-minder</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organised child-minding</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents and member of household/ family</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents and child-minder</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents and organised child-minding</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organised child-minding and child-minder</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents, member of household/ family and Organised child-minding</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of users of child-minding facilities</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 5: Percentage of users of child-minding. (Source: Panel Study of Belgian Households – year of observation 1997. Processed on behalf of Child and Family)
A summary of care facilities ‘only reported’ to “Kind & Gezin” is difficult to make, because these facilities don’t always report the suspension of their care activities. In 1992 there were 661 “POGs” and 110 “POIs” under the category of 'only reported'.

**EDUCATION**

20% of the school population in full-time education is in a nursery school. 32.3% is in primary education and 35.3% is in secondary education. Higher education accounts for 12.4% of the school population. The table shows the distribution of the population of young children in relation to the types of pre-school (mainstream or special education) and the educational networks (Departement Onderwijs, 1998b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gemeenschaps-onderwijs</th>
<th>Vrij gesubsidieerd onderwijs</th>
<th>Officieel gesubsidieerd onderwijs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Community Education]</td>
<td>[Private Subsidised Education]</td>
<td>[Official Subsidised Education]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gewoon [mainstream]</td>
<td>31.986</td>
<td>164.137</td>
<td>245.704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buitengewoon [special education]</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>1.233</td>
<td>1.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.442</strong></td>
<td><strong>165.370</strong></td>
<td><strong>247.515</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13.1%)</td>
<td>(66.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 6: Number of pupils in pre-school education in 1997-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gemeenschaps-onderwijs</th>
<th>Vrij gesubsidieerd onderwijs</th>
<th>Officieel gesubsidieerd onderwijs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Community Education]</td>
<td>[Private Subsidised Education]</td>
<td>[Official Subsidised Education]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gewoon [mainstream]</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>1.329</td>
<td>2.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buitengewoon [special education]</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>352</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.384</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.179</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16.2%)</td>
<td>(63.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 7: Number of “kleuterscholen” (mainstream and special education) in the three educational networks in 1997-1998
Strategies in relation to facilitation of access

**CARE**
The determination of the parental contributions on a sliding scale is one of the general means to facilitate access for all children. On top of this special attention is given to disadvantaged families and areas through extra subsidies.

**EDUCATION**
In general pre-school is accessible to all children. In practice children from families with very low income are facing difficulties to pay the extra costs linked with the school, such as clothing, purchase of material (satchel...), subscription to a magazine, contributions for excursions etc., which can go up to a yearly figure of 100 Euro. In many cases schools and teachers try to help financially, but this doesn’t take away the psychological implications of poverty. This represents one of the main points of attention in the projects “Zorgverbreding” en “Onderwijsvoorrorangsbeleid” it is important to note that Belgium has one of the lowest rates of poverty in world-wide surveys.

Access for children with special educational needs

**CARE**
The integration of children with a handicap is stimulated and a special subsidy is given to “kinderdagverblijven” and “DOGs” in order to meet to a greater extent the special needs of a child with a handicap. New guidelines are being developed to facilitate as well as improve this integrated special needs care.

**EDUCATION**
In the Flemish community education for children with a handicap is separate from mainstream education. The Law on “Buitengewoon onderwijs” of 6/7/1970 as well as the Decree on “Basisonderwijs” of 25/2/1997 defines “Buitengewoon onderwijs” as a type of education that provides teaching, education, care, and therapy suited to the capacity of the pupils of whom the development of the total personality is not or insufficiently assured by the mainstream education, temporarily or permanently. The main objective is the integration of the child in normal family and social life, as far as possible. To attain this goal a very individual approach is used. For each child an ‘intervention plan’ is set up. This plan (with attention to individual goals, methods, ...) forms the daily guide for the teacher. All individual plans have to fit in a ‘group work plan’ for the pedagogical entity. The ‘group work plans’ are attuned in a ‘school work plan’, which is an outline of the content and organisation of teaching. Work in little groups is striven for as plenty as possible with therein an individual approach. The teacher-pupil ratio therefore has to be low. In 1998 it was 5.7 for “Buitengewoon Basisonderwijs”.

The “ontwikkelingsdoelen” are implemented in “Buitengewoon onderwijs” in a somewhat different way, because of the individual approach towards the children. The schools select from an established list of “ontwikkelingsdoelen”, those that are feasible in function of the specific situation of the pupil. The schools have to strive for the selected objectives. (Janssen-Vos & Laevers, 1996). Over the last decade, however, awareness of the importance of integration and of inclusive education is growing and steps are taken in that perspective (see section III.C. Innovative strategies).
3. POLICY APPROACHES

3.1 REGULATIONS

Regulations

In comparing the extent in which the content of ECEC is regulated we can say that ‘education’ is more regulated than ‘care’. This has grown historically because of the greater importance and value attached to education. The last decade, however more attention is directed towards the pedagogical quality of care.

- CARE
  A link can be made between the degree of regulation and the three categories of care facilities. Most regulations concern the category of recognised and subsidised facilities. These have to implement the Quality Decree, which will be an additional condition for the subsidised facilities.

- EDUCATION
  In education there’s also a trend towards bringing the regulations spread over different laws together in order to simplify and make legislation more transparent. The central legislation concerning pre-school education is resumed in the decree on “Basisonderwijs” of 25/2/1997. At the same time there is an obvious evolution towards deregulation. Now, laws give the general framework, instead of describing in full extent how things have to be done.

One of the boundaries set by regulations concerns the number of ‘lestijden’ (teaching time) made available (according to the number of children enrolled in the school). This determines the number of team members. Starting from this, schools are free to group children in whatever way. Schools have the freedom to develop their own curriculum but they have to submit a program describing the content of teaching for approval to the minister of education. These programs are mostly developed by the umbrella organisations of the schools.

On top or the statutory allocation of means, schools can acquire additional subsidies through the temporary projects “Onderwijsvoorrangssbeleid” and “Zorgverbreiding”. These projects target immigrants, children from low SES families (low-income and single-parent families). The areas in which schools have to take initiatives, are settled by decree and ministerial circulars. To assure maximum efficiency in the use of these means, the assignment of these subsidies is on a temporary base and conditional. But again schools have to work out own strategies while they compose their action plans for approval.

Source of regulations

- CARE
  In care, regulations are policy-driven and driven by the possible supply dependent on the budgetary means. Recently however the participation of the field has been more apparent e.g. in the open strategy used to compose and implement the Quality Decree.

- EDUCATION
  In education, all regulations are partly policy-driven and partly demand-driven. In the realisation of the decree on “Basisonderwijs” the representative groups of the “inrichtende machten”, the representative employer’s organisations and of parents associations were consulted amply. This resulted in a global agreement.
Inspection of regulations and facilities

■ CARE
In the area of care, the term ‘inspection’ was changed for ‘quality control’. Its objective is to exercise supervision concerning the application of decrees and laws; to exercise supervision on hygiene, safety, food, to guard the quality of the facilities, with the position of the child in relation to its surroundings as starting point; and to promote quality in general.

At this moment, inspection is in a transitional phase because of the implementation of the Quality decree. In the new strategy the inspectors visit the facilities\(^{18}\). After the inspection visit a letter is sent to the facility, that notifies the positive and negative conclusions of the visit along with suggestions for quality improvement. This happens in a dynamic perspective and mustn’t be necessarily seen as a sanction. Next to this general visit there are also visits as a result of a complaint, to control the conditions for recognition or prolongation of the recognition, or to re-evaluate the pedagogic preconditions. The objective is to follow up the facilities once in a year (Kind & Gezin, 1997a).

The inspections are carried out by qualified social workers. They have had in-service training on the use of the quality scales. The teams are supported by a psychologist or a pedagogue.

Sanctions for the different facilities can be: withdrawal of the recognition, withdrawal of the certificate of supervision, refusal of the first certificate of supervision or refusal of the prolongation of a certificate of supervision. In 1997 the certificate of supervision was not prolonged for one “POI” and 2 “POGs”. For two “POIs” and 5 “POGs” the certificate was withdrawn. 10 first certificates for “POIs” were refused and for “POGs” 24 were refused (Kind & Gezin, 1998a).

■ EDUCATION
Inspections in pre-school are carried out for the greatest extent during the “schooldoorlichting” [school audit] (see section II.A). Other visits are possible, for instance to inspect the compliance with the regulations of the temporary projects “Onderwijsvoorregelsbeleid” and “Zorgverbreding” (see section III.C.).

The aim of the Inspectorate is to perform a school investigation once every six years in every school. This goal hasn’t been reached yet because of the thoroughness of the “schooldoorlichting” and because some vacancies couldn’t be filled in.

The Inspectorate for the “Basisonderwijs” consists of former “Basisonderwijs” teachers, who have taught for at least 10 years and who have proved to know “Basisonderwijs” sufficiently in an exam\(^{19}\). In 1996, the entry requirements for inspectors were broadened to include also candidates with a degree of higher education or university.

New inspectors get training. The purpose is that they acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to fulfil their task in a decent and responsible manner. They also have to fulfil a practical training which lasts a year. All inspectors also get in-service training.

In mainstream and special education, there are 84 inspectors and 6 inspectors-coordinator - one per province and one for the whole of special education - for about 2.600 elementary schools (with about 4.500 school locations).

Inspectors can’t sanction schools directly. The aim is to support the schools in maintaining or establishing qualitative education. However inspectors can give advice to the minister of Education who can take measures. The Inspectorate uses three categories in its judgements: ‘positive judgement’; ‘negative judgement that can become positive’ (if serious shortcomings are assessed, the school gets 300 days to remedy these shortcomings, after which a new investigation takes place); and ‘negative judgement’ (in this case a second investigation by another team takes place). When a negative judgement is made for the second time the Inspectorate advises the minister to withdraw the subsidies of the next year for that school.

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In the schoolyear 1996-1997, 2% of the investigated schools got a negative advice (6 schools). (Departement Onderwijs, 1998a)
Information sharing on the standards attained

In Flanders ‘publicity of administrative documents’ (‘openbaarheid van bestuursdocumenten’) applies. This means that every person or legal body has the possibility to consult almost every administrative document of the administration of the Flemish Community freely. Also the institutions which depend on the Flemish Community fall under this rule. The request for consultation can only be rejected if it concerns: (1) incomplete documents or unfinished files; (2) internal statements; (3) an unreasonable request or a too broad formulation. An ombudsman inspects the correct application of this regulation (Welzijnszakboekje, 1998).

CARE

As a consequence of this rule every one is entitled to know if a care facility is recognised or under supervision. The ‘score’ of a facility on the rating scale however, is not given to the public. Only parents can come to know if a facility meets the basic quality requirements. When a certificate of supervision is withdrawn, parents and the local authority are informed.

EDUCATION

In education, the ‘publicity of administrative documents’ has opened a debate about who has access to the reports of the ‘schooldoorlichting’ and how they are to be made accessible, because this is not clarified in the decree. Arrangements concerning the publicity of reports of “schooldoorlichting” have recently been made. Interested individuals can ask the Inspector-general a report. Reports can not be used for commercial ends or publication.

Promotion of quality by other non-government subsidised actors

CARE

The inspections by “Kind & Gezin” are done starting from the child’s position or the interest of the child. This happened partly under the influence of the ‘Universal Declaration on the Rights of Children’.

The MEQ (Milestones towards Quality through Equality)-network, a co-operation between 6 transnational care organisations gave a serious impulse to childcare training and the sector. This network strives for the improvement of the quality of care through an equal opportunities policy for women and immigrants on the labour market. They try to realise this through the development of training material and specific guiding strategies for long-term unemployed immigrant women. (NOW, 1998b). Kind & Gezin subsidises this initiative.

The ‘Bond van Grote en Jonge Gezinnen’ (BGJ B, Association of Large and Young Families) is an organisation that looks after the interests of families with young children. The association follows up all topics that involve children and their families, undertakes investigations and formulates its point of view on relevant topics.

EDUCATION

An important source of influence in the definition and implementation of quality has been one of the largest unions for teachers in elementary education, the ‘Christen Onderwijzers Verbond’. Since many decades their impact is evident through their journal for teachers and a wide offer of in-service training programmes. They also were very active advocates for the improvement of the status of pre-school teachers and influenced policy in a great deal when matters related to this were on the agenda.

A second actor influencing the standards for quality, is the foundation “Centrum voor ErvaringsGericht Onderwijs” [Centre for experiential education]. It was set up in 1979 starting from a research unit at Leuven University. Its widespread becomes clear in the broad circulation of its periodical (E.G.O-Echo), the distribution of publications, the place of it in the training institutes for “kleuterleidsters”, the many in-service training activities (exceeding 1.700 hrs per year), and the growing international attention for it. One of its contributions is linked to the promotion of the process variables well-being and involvement as main quality criteria which influenced to a great extent the conceptualisation of the projects “Zorgverbreiding” and the instrument developed for the inspectorate.
Relation of regulatory policy in ECEC to regulatory policy for other social services

The care sector has part in the “Gezins- en Welzijnsraad” (family and welfare board). This is a recent participation and consultation medium. It is meant to give the government and the welfare sector the possibility to assume responsibility together for the developments in policy regarding family and welfare. The aim is to co-ordinate policy and to avoid tensions and overlap.

The struggle against poverty is ranking very high in the policy of the Flemish government - although the figures of poverty in Belgium are not high in comparison to the other European countries. An expression of this concern is the establishment of the ‘Vlaams Intersectorieel Comité tegen Armoede – VICA’ [Flemish Inter-sector Committee against Poverty] in 1991. The committee is a forum for consultation and co-operation between the Flemish different ministerial departments and participants in society. Poverty is a problem that manifests itself in diverse domains of society. Only an integral approach can offer a solution.

3.2 STAFFING

Staff roles in ECEC

- CARE

The “kinderverzorgster” is the professional for the “kinderdagverblijf” [day-care centre]. Before 1995, training consisted of two years within a specific curriculum in the vocational stream of secondary education. Since 1995 the training consists of a 2-years – starting at 16 - vocational course in secondary education, which lays the basis for a variety of caring professions. After these 2 years a specialisation year for care can be followed (also at secondary educational level). This specialisation year is made obligatory to work in a “kinderdagverblijf”, where before one could enter after the two-year childcare training. This obligation hasn’t been translated yet in a salary increase.

The “kinderdagverblijf” can replace “kinderverzorgsters” by “kleuterleidsters” [pre-school teachers]. However this possibility can only be used for half of the minimum number of “kinderverzorgsters”. This form of replacement is rather rare (less the 5%). A nurse has the task to support and guide the “kinderverzorgsters” and to observe the children. Her training is a three-year course in an institute for higher education.

Executive functions in a “kinderdagverblijf” or “DOG” can be filled in by a social worker or a social nurse. They can be replaced half-time by a psychologist or pedagogue for a “kinderdagverblijf”. The first two professions are at the level of higher education and take three years. Psychologists and pedagogues are educated at university in a 5-year course.

To work in a “opvanggezin” [home-based child care] there are no diploma requirements. A starting course is not required for persons starting a home-based arrangement but can be asked by services for home-based arrangement. This starting course has to be organised by a “DOG” and can vary substantially according to the organising “DOG”. The starting course can take the form of a few talks, a four days course etc.
According to legislation, workers in “buitenschoolse opvang” have to have an appropriate qualification. A teaching diploma, a certificate of training recognised by “Kind & Gezin” and also expertise acquired through experience are eligible for this position. In the specialisation year for childcare, a module “buitenschoolse opvang” can be chosen. A starting course for workers in “IBOs” was set up by the “VDAB” (the Flemish government service for the promotion of employment) for long-term unemployed, semi- and unskilled workers.

For executives and workers in a “POI”, there are no diploma requirements, but in order to develop a qualitative care, training and education are encouraged.

Centres for retail trade education organise a 2 years (2 x 4 hours a week) management training “Beheerder POI” [manager of a “POI”] at post-secondary level. This training is not compulsory, but hands out a recognised diploma ‘training for head of a company, for the profession of manager of a “POI”’.

Profiles of workers in ECEC

It is obvious that the profiles of “kinderverzorgsters” and of “kleuterleidsters” are quite different and that the structuring of the EC workforce and its training, reflect the structure of ECEC provision.

CARE

Notwithstanding the efforts to change this, the impact of the medical profession on the profile and training of child nurses is still perceivable. Although the latest reform of the training was a step forward, the language used to describe the objectives of the year of specialisation, still bears the mark of the medical model. The impact of social sciences, expertise in child rearing and developmental psychology is still limited.

EDUCATION

In pre-school, staff members are seen as schoolteachers. As a matter of fact, pre-school is part of the school system and the adults working there are teachers who had a lot of psychological, pedagogical and instructional expertise in their training. Although pre-school education has a specific character, it is still seen by a lot of parents as the preparation phase for primary education, especially when children get five.

EDUCATION & CARE

Looking at the evolutions in the profile of workers in the field of care and of education there seems a tendency, from the part of the government, to make the training more general, at least for a part. For instance, before 1995 the “kinderverzorgster” training began already at age 16, where now the specific training for “kinderverzorgster” begins at 18. In education, with the decree on teacher training (16/4/1996) institutions are forced to establish a certain degree of ‘communality’ in the training of pre-school-, primary- and secondary teachers for the first grade. The filling-in of this communality however is left to the institutes. No efforts however are made to promote greater coherency in the training of professionals in care and education. These are two completely separate systems, reflecting different levels of expertise and training.
Preparation for management

**CARE**
Executives of a “kinderdagverblijf” or a “D.O.G.”, are not specifically trained for EC work. Therefore it is seen as desirable for them to follow in-service training to better acquaint with child care matters.

**EDUCATION**
“Directeurs” of pre-schools or elementary schools are themselves experienced teachers. There are no official requirements in terms of training to take on management tasks and the task of supporting teachers; tasks that get more and more demanding. In practice the “inrichtende machten” require that teachers get a so-called ‘Diploma van hogere pedagogische studieën’ (see ‘Career prospects’). To support the “directeurs”, in-service training is an important means.

Working with children with SEN & diversity

**CARE**
Growing attention is paid in the training of “kinderverzorgsters” to children with SEN and also to diversity. In the specialisation year for “kinderverzorgster”, the students have to complete a basic module and next to this, they can choose between four modules. Two of these modules concern children with special needs. The first focuses on children with behavioural difficulties, emotional disturbed children or children with a handicap. The second concerns ‘intercultural work’ and aims to make care accessible for immigrant parents.

**EDUCATION**
During their 3-years education, “kleuterleidsters” have to gain experience in diverse schools with different target groups and different teaching methods. A part of their practical training has to be done in “Buitengewoon onderwijs”.

A lot of importance though is attached to in-service training. For teachers who are already teaching in “Buitengewoon onderwijs”, a special in-service training programme is organised. It’s a part-time training which takes two years. The certificate of the course is not obliged to work in “Buitengewoon onderwijs”, but in practice certain organising bodies expect their teachers to follow the course. The staff in “Buitengewoon onderwijs” who followed this course, are financially rewarded for this additional effort (Janssen-Vos & Laevers, 1996).

From the part of policy, indications for more attention to children with SEN is expressed in the initiative of the VIOR (the section for Elementary education) to elaborate the concept of ‘inclusive education’ as one of the guiding principles for the future of education in Flanders. The abolition of the division between special and mainstream education is one of the elements of this stand.

In the context of the temporary project on “Zorgverbreding” special attention is given to children who - in principle - belong to mainstream education but demand special attention and preventive measures (see III.C.).

In-service training of EC workers

**CARE**
Because of the lack of initial training requirements (for “opvanggezinnen”, “POGs” and “POIs”) on one hand and because of the insufficient basic training on the other, a lot of efforts are being made to organise all sorts of in-service training.

The Quality Decree obliges the subsidised sector to organise or participate in continuous training, but no demands are placed concerning the quantity and the kind of training. They have to prove that the in-service training they choose for, is part of their pedagogical policy plan, so continuity of training is assured. At the moment, legislation concerning this topic, is being adjusted.

No special subsidies are allocated to care facilities for the purpose of in-service training, which makes it difficult for them to organise training. Despite of the lack of budgetary means, the response to follow courses is large and the amount of courses has expanded enormously the last years. The training centres are not able to manage the demand.